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|#### Debate with a self proclaimed "Secularist" Modernist Muslim

#### Farida Majid

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*This is a response to a Bengali lady who defends Islam while claiming to be working for the secularization of her country. I sent a copy of that to my freethinking Bengali friends and one of them decided to publish it in the NFB. http://www.bangladesh-web.com/news/may/23/gv4n575.htm#A1*

20 May 2001

Dear Farida Majid,

I published the images of the Prophet in my website, which according to the Sunnis is an outrageous blasphemy. But I said that those Iranians who painted them did so out of love and devotion. In reaction to that you were kind enough to write: “It is true that the painters of these Persian pictures were not blasphemous. In fact the beauty of these pictures emanates from the innocent piety that the painters had in their heart. By the way it is the first time Ali Sina said something that exposed that he has, hidden somewhere beneath his hardened heart, another heart softer and more humane.”

Let me thank you for seeing my softer heart and I assure you that I have only one heart. I am sorry that what I write about Islam is not to your liking. However, if you pay closer attention you’ll also see that all I write is out of love. There is not a grain of malice in me and I have no ulterior motives. Of course you can accuse me of being completely misguided. This I admit is possible, for people could be very wrong and still very sincere. In fact most people fall within this category. The majority of people; SINCERELY believe in their twisted and misguided ways, do harm and perpetrate crimes all in the name of the truth, in good faith and clear conscience. How can I be sure that I am not one of them? Of course since I am aware of this possibility, I do not do crimes, i.e. I do not kill people, persecute them or harm them in any shape or form to impose my version of the truth. I am also open and waiting for someone to come and guide me to a better way. And I say that also with sincerity.

However, since such person has not yet shown up and those who have tried have either given up too soon or ended up insulting me and even some challenged me to curse each other to determine who tells the truth (This was the habit of the Prophet Q.3:61. I don’t like cursing people) I have not seen a better way yet. Nevertheless, if anyone can prove that what I say is absurd, I will not hesitate to change my position at once and become his/her disciple for the rest of my life or until someone else shows me yet an even better way.

Your recounting of your visit to Iran made me feel very nostalgic and believe me my eyes

swelled with tears. These days I feel more sentimental about my beloved motherland because she is sick, she has been taken hostage by a 12 headed evil dragon and a bunch of ruthless hooligans who are killing torturing and ripping her children like never before. Her days of glory are gone and disgrace has befallen upon her. A disgrace that has lasted for 1400 years.

Your diagnosis of what was wrong in Iran prior to the revolution and what went wrong after the revolution is right. But I beg to disagree when you accuse the Bengali freethinkers and say: “In the midst of the current political chaos in Bangladesh, Islam-bashing is a dangerous game”. In my view any recognition of Islam as a legitimate religion is automatically endorsing its inherent violence. The inherent violence of Islam is not a matter of opinion. It’s clear that the whole Quran is a message of hate, of killing the unbelievers, of intolerance, of mind control, of misogyny, of women abuse and of war. There is no way that any person with an unbiased mind could read those hate laden provocative verses of Quran and call that book a book of peace. If you are in any doubt please take a look at this link and this is just a sample.

So, when a peace loving intellectual like you professes Islam and recommends that religion, those who listen to you and value your judgment,  read the book of Quran and get their instructions from there and not from you. Therefore if they follow those instructions and act accordingly with violence and brutality they are not to be blamed, you are the culprit. You told them that Quran is the words of God and Quran tells them to hate and kill. You don’t have to be a brain surgeon to see the relationship. In my article Who Feeds Fundamentalism,  I spoke about this and also quoted a report from Time Magazine of Singapore that proves my point. In that report an educated woman from a nice Muslim family turns a terrorist, throwing colored dye in the faces of women not wearing hijab, encouraging her husband to take other wives and raising her sons with the love of gun hoping to convert them into Islamic terrorists. Why? Because she read a book about some Western women who had accepted Islam! That is all the incentive that she needed to become a terrorist.

Dear friend, please understand that Islam is not like Christianity, Zoroastrianism or any other religion. Islam is a religion that teaches hate. Hate is the message of Islam. Hate is the essence of Islam. Every other thing in Islam, all its rituals and dogmas gear you for this ultimate objective, which is hate.

Until you deny this fact and until you try to envision a peaceful Islam that exists nowhere except in your own imagination, you will not be able to see that Islam is an obstacle to peace, democracy, civility and progress in our countries.

You were completely right is describing the errors of the Iranian intellectuals for trusting the clergy and letting the revolution to be hijacked by the fundamentalists. Well these intellectuals made exactly the same mistake that you are doing now. They threw their lots with the Muslims thinking that eventually they will take over the government and will stir the country towards democracy and freedom. But if they were wise they would have known that this is impossible. Anyone who knows Islam knows that Islam and democracy are incompatible. Trying to make Islam democratic is like trying to make a square round. You'll have better chance converting hyenas to vegetarianism than making Islam tolerant.

How in the world, you among all people, who have lived in the West for so many years,

and have academic qualifications, and are among the intellectuals can not see that it is you who is playing a very dangerous game by endorsing Islam; a religion that advocates hate and killings? I could have excused you for that if you were a less educated Muslim, but your lack of sensitivity in this matter despite your diplomas and degrees is beyond me!

I would like to request that you honor me and read my article Who Feeds Fundamentalism. Then please write to me and tell me whether I am not justified to hold YOU responsible for the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, for the atrocities of the Taliban, for the brutalities of the Iranian Mullahs, for the World Trade Center bombing and for the blowing up the buses of the foreign tourists in Egypt. Indeed I do not hold those brainwashed fundamentalists who commit these crimes responsible! They are ignorant. They are brainwashed. They are themselves victims. The responsibility of their atrocities, stupidities and crimes falls directly on YOUR shoulders. You are the one who tells them that Islam is a good thing. You are the one who is upholding that hatemongering book and calling it a divine revelation. And you have the PhD. You are educated and a respected intellectual. The ignorant and uneducated masses of the Muslims look up unto you. They trust you and they trust your judgment. They assume: You have been to the West, you have studied, you have earned your degree, so you must know what you are saying. If you tell them that Quran is a book from God then it is. If you assure them that it is scientific, they believe it. If you tell them that it is a miracle, it must be. Those ignorant uneducated masses look unto you to tell them what is right and what is not. They take their confirmation from you, but then go and get their instructions from Quran; that very backward primitive book that teaches them to hate, to kill, to tyrannize and to violate the human rights because God wants them to be harsh with the unbelievers, be oppressive with the women and be hateful towards all non-Muslims.

Dear friend, you cannot wash your hands of your responsibilities. Please do not assume that I am exaggerating when I call you responsible. No indeed, I am not. I really hold you responsible for the deaths perpetrated in the hands of Islamic fundamentalists and I demand that you stop supporting terrorism. By vying for Islam you are vying for terrorism even if you give lip service to peace. I plead with you to withdraw your support from Islam, this doctrine of hate. Let it die. Let us kill it together, for it is either it or humanity.

Islam is like Nazism; both these doctrines preach hate. One stands for the superiority of a race and the other of a religion. But in essence they both believe in the same precepts. They both advanced by war. They both are divisive and sectarian. They were both born out of the minds of charismatic but narcissistic megalomaniac mad men. How would you qualify the intellectual nazi who upholds that doctrine of hate and calls it teachings of love? How would you define someone who defends Nazism, expends of her time and money to advance it and writes about it to promote it? Whether this person is genuine in her belief that Nazism is a doctrine of peace or not is irrelevant. The fact of the matter is that her support of Nazism makes her culprit of all the crimes perpetuated by the Nazis. She becomes responsible, even if she has never killed anyone personally and has never wished the death of anyone. She is supporting a doctrine and a philosophy that promotes hate and murder and that is what matters.

Now you my friend are not much different. You are supporting Islam and that makes you culprit of all the crimes that Muslims commit inspired by their holy book. You tell them that Islam is a good religion and Quran is a good book and the Quran teaches them to kill the unbelievers, to view the non-Muslims as Najis (impure) to beat their wives if they are

disobedient, to hold women in contempt and call them deficient in intelligence, to wage war against the non Muslims, to not befriend with the Christians and the Jews and to live in constant hate, isolation and distrust. How can you look yourself in the mirror? Doesn't your conscience bother you? Don't you feel guilty of misleading people and encouraging them to remain in their ignorance?

Am I wrong? Is not Islam all the above? Then prove it to me. I will accept if you can really show me that Islam teaches love, unity, brotherhood of all humankind, equality of rights between men and women and is a religion of peace. But if all the evidences point to the contrary please don't try to fool yourself! Do not try to lie about it.

Hereby I give you my solemn pledge to denounce "Islam-bashing" (as you call it) and become a Muslim fighting for all Islamic ideals, if you prove that Islam is a religion of peace, of love and of unity of all mankind. Can you make the same honest pledge with courage that if I show you Islam is not what you think it is you will leave it? Would you leave this cult if I prove it to you that Islam is the cause of backwardness, religious strives and bigotry in our countries? Would you still call yourself a Muslim if I bring the evidence that Islam is a doctrine of hate, intolerance and wars? This is a challenge. Would you accept this challenge? Are you willing to re-scrutinize the claims of the Prophet with fairness and with open mind?

Dear friend, we live only once. Let us not waste this precious life in the pursuit of a wild goose. By the mercy of God, Heaven or Universe (whatever you want to call it) you and I have been given the privilege to influence many lives. This privilege entails responsibilities. People like you and I build this world and shape the human destiny. Can we afford to neglect our responsibility? Shouldn't we stop and meditate, even if it is once in our lives? Shouldn't we question what has been given to us in our childhood as facts, which we accepted trustingly then? I think it is. I think we should. I think we have to stop and see where we are going before going there. We might be heading towards a deadly precipice and we may be bringing upon ourselves calamities of incalculable magnitude. Let us pause. Let us think. Before we go head on.

With warmest regards

Your "softhearted" friend

Ali Sina

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26 May 2001

Dear brother Ali Sina,

I am glad you've written to me directly. It is also pleasing to me that we are talking of love in our hearts. Without love there cannot be any genuine commitment to the common humanity, to the world we live in, or to justice in the society.

Today, my heart is heavy with anxiety for my aging father who has become so frail that I may have to drop everything and fly to Bangladesh. I should tell you that my father,

an engineer, considered himself 'a man of science' all his life and brought up his two daughters without any religious education. I am not a practicing Muslim, though I'm not quite the aetheist that my father is.

Therefore, I'm sorry, I cannot take up the challenge you threw at me. Also, I'm not exactly in the business of defending or eulogizing Islam. There are others who do it regularly. As a scholar I believe my duty is to do the analytical thinking, i.e. asking the right questions and then finding the answers to the best of my abilities.

Because of my culturally eclectic upbringing and my own worldwide travels, I have learned to respect all people of all background, including their religion. A religion is, by definition, a cultural artifice. Much intellect, emotion and imagination are invested in fashioning this cultural artifice. That is why I like studying religion along with politics, history and literature. I have no right to insult a religion if I claim to be a member in the family of mankind. To single out one religion for the purpose of insulting it is the most illogical act and follows neither the matter of principles nor the laws of civility. When crimes are committed in the name of a religion, I would rather analyze the conditions, the political, historical and social backgrounds of that crime and its perpetrators, than blankly blame the religion.

Such analysis requires knowledge -- a lot of knowledge. In today's complex world every event is globally connected. Hence limited or biased knowledge is not sufficient for in-depth analysis that can be of any use to the community. Insulting a religion blatantly exposes the basic ignorance of those who indulge in the incivility.

I understand the pain you feel, Ali Sina, about your motherland, which is why I wanted to share with you my fond memories of my visit to Iran. My hope is that these dark days will pass --soon-- and there will be another dawn.

About that Kermanshahi song, the Afghani people know that folksong very well, perhaps because Kermanshah is closer to the border of Afghanistan.

Please wish my country well, because like the Iranians, and like ordinary people everywhere, the Bengali Muslims are secular

people, especially since we have been a multireligious country for more than nine hundred years. The dirty politics of the Islamists are ruining the traditional culture of our country. And I too am pained as I watch our corrupt, ineffective politicians unable to check the tide of this dirty Islamist politics.

With all my best,

Farida Majid.

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27 May 2001

Dear Sister Farida.

I am so pleased to see that you are not upset with me for being harsh on Islam and still call me brother. It is an honor for me.

I am sorry to hear about the delicate health of your beloved father and I hope, that he recover very soon and you will have your peace of mind back. I am also impressed to learn that your father is a freethinker. My family was a very religious one and I was raised as a very religious person. In fact I was the most religious person in all my extended family (cousins and second cousins). I was known as Akhoond Ali (Mulla Ali ) when I was a freshman in high school. However, as my mother recently confessed my grandfather was a freethinker. He was a philosopher and a mystic. Though I never saw him, it pleases me to know that I am taking the path trodden by him, It is like carrying his torch.

You said that you are not a practicing Muslim though you are not as atheist as your father.

Well, let me tell you that I am also not an atheist in the strict sense of the world. Of course I am not a theist either. That is to say that my views of this universe are not materialistic. I believe in a spiritual reality permeating everything and I call that reality the Single Principle. However, I am not religious.

As for the challenge, actually I did not want it to sound confrontational. In a debate, the one who learns most is the winner. It is in with this spirit that I start my debates.

You wrote, “As a scholar I believe my duty is to do the analytical thinking, i.e. asking the right questions and then finding the answers to the best of my abilities”.

I salute you for that. As a student of knowledge this is also my objective. If you do not want to be an apologist of Islam, I understand. But because of your noble thoughts expressed above, I think it become imperative for both of us to ask the right questions and help each other find the best answers.

In my opinion, asking whether Islam is the source of the backwardness and human right abuses in our countries or not is a very important question. This is the question we never had the chance to ask. But now that we can ask such questions and not fear the execution, I think it is high time we asked ourselves for the first time: Is Islam true? Is Islam helping our people to progress intellectually, morally, spiritually, scientifically, politically, culturally and economically? Is Islam really the culprit for the social unrest, wars and upheavals in our countries? Was Islam responsible for the splitting of the mighty India in three feuding nations and the death of millions of innocent people? Is Islam responsible for the mayhem in Afghanistan, the chaos in Iran, the commotion in Kashmir, the turmoil in Philippines, the pandemonium in Palestine, the anarchy in Algeria, the human right abuses in Egypt, the honor killings in Pakistan and Jordan, and the brutalities in Saudi Arabia?

Well, the answer to all those questions could be no. Islam may come out completely unblemished after questioning. But we shall never know if we don’t ask. If you are certain that Islam is innocent, then there should be no harm enlightening those who have these doubts. Why not confront the critics and respond to their concerns? Why attack them? Why assassinate their character? Why imprison, and kill them?

You wrote that you have no right to insult religion and added “To single out one religion for the purpose of insulting it is the most illogical act and follows neither the matter of principles nor the laws of civility.” I agree with you completely. No one should insult the religion of others, demean its follower, or god forbid, coerce them to abandon their faith. This practice is uncivilized, absolutely unacceptable and must be reprimanded. That is precisely why the freethinkers are trying to stop Islam. Islam insults the religion of others. The holy Prophet himself taunted the religions of the Quraish so much that they went to Abi Talib, Muhammad’s aging uncle and complained:

“*This Nephew of thine hath spoken opprobriously of our gods and our religion: and hath abused us as fools, and given out that our forefathers were all astray. Now, avenge us thyself of our adversary; or, (seeing that thou art in the same case with ourselves,) leave him to its that we may take our satisfaction*.” Muir p. 162

The Prophet did not stop there. He invaded the Mecca and in an act of sacrilege destroyed their gods. The Taliban just were following the example of the Prophet when they destroyed the sculptures of Buddha in Bamyan. I have a collection of several verses of Quran. Please go through some of those verses and you’ll see how Muhammad violated the very noble principles you are upholding and why the Muslims following those teachings have become the number one violators of human rights. We, the freethinkers do not Insult Islam. I have read many excellent dissertations by great Bengali freethinkers about Islam. I have adorned my site with some of those articles. I found all of them scholarly prepared and logically expressed. I have never come across one article where the writer insulted Islam or its founder. On the other hand Muhammad insulted everyone. He cursed them and he fought them. He killed them, he banished them, he enslaved them and he told that they would go to Hell. The prophet did more than insulting. He abused every human rights of people who did not believe in his religion. Muslims are doing the same. The Taliban’s decree that the Hindus wear the badge of shame is nothing new in Islam. The Zimies have always been required to distinguish themselves so in a rainy day they do not defile (najis) a Muslim by letting a drop of rain, fall from them on the latter.

Dear Sister, we have to stop this abuse and this insult. Islam teaches discrimination; Islam teaches hate; Islam insults and abuses the people of other faiths. As a humanist you want to stop that. This is what you want too. I am sure when you said you do not approve insulting religion of others, it means you must take side with us and fight against any doctrine that make such insults.

You wrote; “When crimes are committed in the name of a religion, I would rather analyze the conditions, the political, historical and social backgrounds of that crime and its perpetrators, than blankly blame the religion.”

As an educated person you know that this is not a scientific method. Why you a priori presume that everything else could be responsible and rule out religion? May be precisely that is the source of the problem. May be it is the religion and not the political, historical or social backgrounds that is to be blamed. I am not saying that religion is the culprit, but to rule out the religion is not logical. Why? Why would any rational person limit his or her options? I think that the reason dictates that you include the religion among the suspects and start your investigation all over again, with an unbiased mind, free from preconceived ideas and open to accept the results whatever they may be. Could it be

that religion is responsible for the historical background of a nation? Is it possible that religion influences the social and political milieu of the countries? How can we exclude religion from such important analysis?

You wrote; “Such analysis requires knowledge -- a lot of knowledge. In today's complex world every event is globally connected. Hence limited or biased knowledge is not sufficient for in-depth analysis that can be of any use to the community.”

Of course it requires knowledge. I always say that knowledge is the best antidote to ignorance. Despite the fact that I agree with you that we need knowledge and the more you have the better it is, to make such analysis about religion, i.e. to verify the truth or falsehood of any religion, and its usefulness for the society, you do not need to have a lot of knowledge. Religions have become too complex. So many people have written so many things about them and so many philosophies, schools of thoughts and institutions have been created around them that the task seems to be too daunting. But in reality it is not. What we have to do is just read the books that these religions claim to be the revealed words of God and the source of their guidance. Anyone who reads the books of the Bible or the Quran with an open mind and without prejudice can see that these books are full of errors and outright crazy. You don’t need too much knowledge to know that when Muhammad says: stars are missiles that Allah shoots at the Jinns, who stand on each other’s shoulders to climb the heaven and eavesdrop the conversation of the Exalted Assembly, he is talking baloney. Quran is so full of mistakes and nonsense that really a schoolboy can see its absurdity. The reason so many Muslims don’t see it is because they don’t read that book and those who read it and stay Muslims do not want to see it.

At the end you asked me to wish well for Bangladesh and complained about “the dirty politics of the Islamists ruining the traditional culture of your country”.

I do wish well for your country with the bottom of my hearth, and that is why I plead with you to join me and the other freethinkers of your country, ask and find answers about those important questions that affect the well being of your country. Ask about the effect of Islam on Bangladesh and its people, their culture, their civility, their productivity, their priorities, etc. Does Islam make people more moral? Is Islam ethical? Does Islam foster the unity of family? Does Islam stand for gender equality? Does Islam advance national unity by giving to all its citizens the same rights and privileges irrespective of their faith? Does Islam promote science? Does it cultivate culture and advancement of human mind, by encouraging philosophy and arts? Does Islam advocate democracy, freedom of expression and freedom of thoughts? Has Islam been a positive influence in your country? Did really Islam benefit Bangladesh? I don’t say that it has or it hasn’t. I just say these are important questions. Why not ask them? Just ask these questions, ponder upon them, open dialogues with others, and listen to those who agree and those who disagree. Then you are ready to make up your mind with knowledge and clear conscience.

Not many people are emotionally ready or intellectually disposed to ask pressing questions such as these. Finding the answers to these questions may be heartbreaking. Truth will set you free but it aint easy to swallow. If you don’t see yourself fit for facing the truth: that is fine. Stay out of it. Don’t ask questions that may shatter your biased beliefs and your cherished faith. Keep your head under the sand and pretend nothing is wrong.

Freethinking is not for everyone. It requires strength of character. It requires devotion to the Truth and an uncluttered mind to accept the truth whatever it may be. If you don't see yourself ready for that, do not let people force you into it. But please do not stand in the way of those who are ready to face the truth. Do not be an obstacle in the way of brave men and women of your great land who have risen valiantly to slaughter the beast of Islam that is sucking the blood of your nation. Do not taunt them, do not belittle them, do not blemish their character if you cannot respond to their logical arguments.

Please define your position clearly. You either believe in Islam or you don't. You are either pregnant or you are not. You cannot sit on the fence saying I am a not practicing Muslim. What do you mean by not practicing Muslim? Don't you believe that Islam is the religion of God? If you do, why you don't practice it? Why you don't wear veil? Why you don't allow your husband to marry more wives? Why you don't obey him and instead prefer the infidel's way of equality? Why would you take him to the court if he raises his hand on you, despite the fact that Allah give him this right? Why you demand equal pay when you know that you are deficient in intelligence? (This is what Muhammad said). If Islam is good why you don't follow it? But if it isn't why you prescribe it for others? Why you think the poor women in the villages of Bangladesh should be oppressed by the inhumane laws of this religion that you do not follow? To say to the wronged and uneducated women of your country that Islam is good for you while you yourself do not like it for yourself is hypocrisy. This is very unethical. I do not expect that from you sister.

Dear sister, once more let me plead with you humbly and beg you to join us in this holy crusade. This task is so sacred, the rewards are so immense, the field is so vast, and the workers are so few that we cannot afford not having you on our side. Please join the forces of light. Please join the freethinkers of your country. Please fight the darkness of bigotry and religious hate. Please help the masses of people in Bangladesh realize that our forefathers made a mistake, or better said: were forced to make this mistake. Pease be a heroine. Please be a pioneer. Please be part of the solution. Please let the future generations remember you with pride. But if you cannot, if you don't see that stamina and that strength of character in yourself, please do not stand in the way of the freedom fighters of your country. If you don't want to be part of the solution, don't be part of the problem. Please!

Leaving your religion that you have grown up with is not easy. Religion is addictive. I should know. I have been there. You go through stages of denial, bewilderment, shame, shock, guilt, frustration, and anger sometimes all of that at the same time. But the last stage is enlightenment and freedom. The result is great, but the process is painful. Believe me, once you are out of it, you know that it was worth it.

With my best wishes,

Your brother

Ali|